THE
Dan Smoot Report

Vol. 16, No. 14 (Broadcast 763) April 6, 1970 Dallas, Texas

DAN SMOOT

LET'S HAVE FREE SCHOOLS

John Dewey — father of progressive education — introduced socialist theory and revolution to American schools, supplanting traditional education, which had stressed hard work, honor, duty, self-reliance with Divine guidance, personal achievement, individualism.

In 1904, Dewey became head of Teachers College at Columbia University, where his ideas molded the thinking of leading educationists. By 1945, many (if not most) American public school systems had been converted, in whole or in part, to Dewey's progressivism.

For a generation, educationists who controlled many public schools scorned basic education and stressed life-adjustment at the expense of real learning, group-togetherness instead of academic discipline.

By 1950, many American parents realized that something was wrong. We had the costliest, most elaborate educational system in the history of civilization; yet, it was graduating young people who could not spell, write a correct sentence, work simple arithmetic problems, or read with understanding; who had not been disciplined in work habits; who were ignorant of the history and traditions of their own country.

But citizens, who criticized the schools they were being taxed to support, were roundly condemned by educationists and political leaders. The decade of the 1950's was marked by many jarring controversies between parents dissatisfied with our public school system, and educationists who praised the system as the best on earth.

Then came Sputnik I — the Soviet Union's first earth-orbiting man-made satellite — in October, 1957. Fear swept over our country — fear that the Soviets were surpassing us in vital fields of scientific development. People who had been defending our educational system as the very best, cited the launching of Sputnik as proof that American education was lagging, that Soviet schools were training

THE DAN SMOOT REPORT is published weekly by The Dan Smoot Report, Inc., Box 9538, Dallas, Texas 75214 (office at 6441 Gaston Ave.). Subscriptions: $18.00 for 2 years; $10.00, 1 year; $6.00, 6 months. Dan Smoot was born in Missouri, reared in Texas. With BA and MA degrees from SMU (1938 and 1940), he joined the Harvard faculty (1941) as a Teaching Fellow, doing graduate work in American civilization. From 1942 to 1951, he was an FBI agent; from 1951 to 1955, a commentator on national radio and television. In 1955, he started his present independent, free-enterprise business: publishing this REPORT and abbreviating it each week for radio and TV broadcasts available for commercial sponsorship by business firms.

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more and better scientists and engineers than American schools were.

All previous controversies about school curricula, textbooks, federal aid to education, were buried under an avalanche of propaganda about the desperate need to improve American education with vast outlays of federal tax money.

Before becoming President, Eisenhower had said that all who advocate federal aid to education are guilty of extravagance with public money, of dishonesty, and of behavior "more dangerous to our form of government than any external threat that can possibly be arrayed against us." After becoming President, Eisenhower urged Congress to pass the National Defense Education Act as an "emergency program. . . . in the essential interest of national security." Congress passed the Act in 1958, the first really comprehensive federal-aid-to-education law. The general purpose of this law was to refurbish the American educational system — denounced as inadequate by the very people who had previously praised it in extravagant terms. The specific objective was to improve the teaching of science, mathematics, and foreign languages at all school levels.

Apparently, goals were to be reversed: Dewey's progressive education was to be abandoned; schools were to search out and encourage excellence, instead of limiting curricula to life-adjustment programs watered down to the lowest common denominator of the student masses.

The brightest students were segregated into accelerated classes, so that they would not be held back by the pace of less gifted youngsters. Standards for admission to college were generally raised.

Federal aid to education increased annually and sharply after 1958. Kennedy expanded the federal role in education during 1963. Johnson vastly extended it in 1964, under pretext of fighting poverty.

In 1965, Congress approved Johnson's Elementary-Secondary Education Act — and authorized $7 billion for one year of federal spending on education. Since then, annual federal appropriations for education have skyrocketed; and the federal government has had a hand in financing and controlling American educational institutions at all levels, from kindergarten through college.

Under almost-total federal control after enactment of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965, public schools once again abandoned individual initiative, scholastic excellence, and academic discipline as desirable objectives. School standards were again adjusted to the lowest common denominator. Racial integration, as prescribed by federal bureaucrats and courts, became the primary objective of public schools. Note this passage from a survey made by *U. S. News & World Report* a year after the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965 went into effect:

"From nursery school through university, teaching is to be geared to the backward child this year more than ever before. . . .

"Losing out, somewhat, is the drive in recent years to stiffen U. S. academic standards and push the bright child ahead faster.

"New emphasis is being given to the schools as 'social instruments' that are to provide special advantages for the slow learner. . . .

"In Washington, D. C., the school board has ordered an end to the 'track system' which separates youngsters according to ability. In the nation's capital, as in other big cities, this system has been under fire from Negro leaders who complain that it 'segregates' most slum children into classes for slow learners."(1)

Headstart is the most significant federal education program begun in 1965. Headstart gives pre-school training and experience to children ages 3, 4, and 5 from "culturally deprived" homes. The program has been lavishly praised as a means of giving "ghetto" children a chance to narrow the gap between their learning abilities and those of children from less "disadvantaged" homes.

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Hundreds of millions of dollars a year have been spent on it; but it has failed, totally.

On April 14, 1969, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) sent Congress a report revealing that school children who had attended Headstart pre-school training programs did not differ "in their intellectual and socio-personal development from comparable children who did not attend" Headstart before entering school.[2]

President Nixon concluded that Headstart had failed because it had been supervised by the wrong agency (OEO), and because it was too limited. In three major addresses during the late summer of 1969,[3] Nixon outlined his proposals for welfare and manpower training. He asked for "a major expansion of day-care centers" for the children of welfare families, recommending that supervision of Headstart be transferred from OEO to the Department of HEW, and that prolonged Headstart training be given children in the day-care centers. The President said:

"There is no single ideal to which this administration is more firmly committed than to the enriching of a child's first five years of life."[3]

"We have declared the first five years of a child's life to be a period of special and specific federal concern.

"New knowledge recently acquired has shown that these earliest formative years are crucial to a child's later development. Yet, with only random exceptions, no provision has previously been made to insure the welfare of children during these years. With an eye to the next generation, we have made it our business to fill this void."[3]

"I am . . . requesting authority . . . to provide child care for the 450,000 children of the 150,000 current welfare recipients to be trained [for jobs].

"The child care I propose is more than custodial. This administration is committed to a new emphasis on child development in the first five years of life. . . ."[3]

What could result from the federal government's assuming responsibility for the first five years of every child's life? A harbinger of things to come has been revealed by U. S. Representative Lloyd Meeds (Washington Democrat). Meeds wants legislation for $300 million in day-care and early-childhood-education centers throughout the United States.

Meeds says "a lot of our ideas about Headstart came from Israel." Consequently, he went to Israel to make a 12-day study of communal child-rearing there. He was delighted with what he learned. "The Israeli kibbutz," he said, "provides pure democratic communism, which is the essence of Karl Marx."[4] The child is taken from parents in infancy. For the first six weeks, the mother is allowed frequent visits for nursing and feeding. Thereafter, parents are restricted to two-hour daily visits. The communist kibbutz becomes the child's family.

Meeds sees this as the ideal way to rear children. In a newspaper interview on February 16, 1970, he was reported as saying:

"American mothers are . . . anxious, and leading busy, complicated, unquiet lives.

"A worrisome American mother produces insecure children who dislike themselves. . . .

"The Israeli boys and girls who are products of kibbutzim living, seem to be well adjusted, outgoing, happy, gregarious, and satisfied."[4]

Representative Meeds has not yet formally proposed that the federal government create and finance communist kibbutzim to take charge of the children of America; and, certainly, President Nixon has not gone that far. But just what they *do* propose is not clear. All we know for certain is that the leftwing Democrat Representative from the State of Washington is at one with the Republican President in believing that the care and training of babies should be a responsibility of the federal government.

Our children are being used as guinea pigs for social experimentation — as pawns in vicious

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political power plays. The end result will be the destruction of our civilization.

What we call *free public schools* are *costly government schools*, operated on the totalitarian principle of universal coercion. Administrators of government schools are answerable, not to parents, but to political authorities who dispense tax money.

Mashing all children down to a low level of mediocrity, squeezing them into a common mold prescribed by agitators, sociologists, and politicians; eradicating self-respecting individualism; cultivating a crowd culture which makes human beings blind conformists in all things involving intellect and spirit, but renders them violent anarchists when seeking gratification of animal appetites, or acting as faceless factors in a mob — *these are goals toward which government schools are gravitating.*

But there is little we can do about the peril, within the framework of the existing system.

Some parents want their children in racially integrated schools; others do not. Some parents want their children given religious instruction in school; others do not. Some parents approve of a school curriculum which concentrates on group-togetherness and life-adjustment but graduates ignoramuses, unexposed to academic disciplines; other parents would like their children drilled hard in the use of basic educational tools — reading, writing, arithmetic — and would like them instructed in the history of their state and nation.

Atheists have managed to have God outlawed from public schools; but what *constructive* influence can parents exert? For the most part, the only allowable role of parents in a government school system is to furnish children and money.

What *can* we do? We can abolish government schools and build free schools — free of control by governmental authorities whose motivations are political, not educational.

We would thus reduce the cost of education by several billion dollars a year, and provide better education for children than they have had since compulsory tax-supported schools replaced private and parochial schools 100 years ago.

How about children whose parents could not pay tuition? The people of America voluntarily contribute enough money to maintain churches for millions of members; and they voluntarily give billions to support religious, educational, charitable, artistic, and scientific institutions all over the world. It is absurd to say they would not educate children of the poor without the force of law.

If the billions now confiscated in taxes for our monstrously expensive government schools were left in the hands of the people, there would be enough money in every community to provide real education for children.

FOOTNOTES

(1) *U. S. News & World Report*, Sept. 5, 1966

(2) New York Times News Service, Apr. 14, 1969

(3) President's TV speech on welfare reform, Aug. 8, 1969; Welfare Reform Message to Congress, Aug. 11, 1969; speech to National Governors Conference, Sept. 1, 1969

(4) "U. S. Preschool Care To Follow Israeli Kibbutzim? Meeds Enthusiastic About Idea," *Everett Herald* (Washington), Feb. 16, 1970

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